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EPA "Living With Vermiculite" brochure is confusing and contradictory

Editor:

Regarding the brochure sent to all Libby postal recipients, "Living with Vermiculite," rarely has such a confused message been sent to so many. In the pages of this brochure nearly every conceivable message regarding tremolite asbestos is being sent.

First, "low level exposures generally are not a concern," then, "there are no certain guidelines on what is or is not safe." You will find many more such examples in this brochure, however, from an outside viewpoint, I can tell you that the environmental exposure levels that occurred in Libby were definitely not "high-level exposures."

For example, most asbestos workers in the world have been exposed for 20 years and more to lev-

els of about 40 to 60 fibers per cubic centimeter, all day, every day. So too were the workers at the W. R. Grace facilities, although their exposures were highly intermittent. However, most Libby residents never got anywhere near that amount of exposure.

The EPA has recently announced in Oakland, Calif., that Libby people were exposed to between 0.5 and 1.5 fibers per centimeter. There is a great deal of argument about even these numbers since when they were taken there were serious scientific constraints on our ability to determine if a measurement was a true 1.5 fibers per cubic centimeter or not. Most likely not.

What the science tells all of us at this point is that it is exactly the op-

posite of what the brochure indicates that one should be concerned about. In fact, a lot more than just concerned. Small, low-level exposures to tremolite asbestos (the kind in Libby, not the other kind of asbestos that the EPA wants to talk about so much) encountered at least twice in one's life, for brief periods, are significant in causing human disease. Sure, levels of diseases and death are "generally low" for asbestos, but if you remove chrysotile fibers from the word "asbestos," all of a sudden you have phenomenally high disease and death rates, unequalled around the world in its known ability to cripple entire communities, just exactly as you have witnessed in Libby.

The science tells us that the absolute worst thing you can do envi-

ronmentally is to set up a scenario in "any" town where people will be encountering these exposures. That is what the EPA is proposing to do by leaving behind vermiculite throughout Libby.

I am not the only person who knows this. Armies of scientists know this. Remember, "your ignorance is the government's bliss" and "all it takes for evil to succeed is for good men to do nothing."

It is time for you to set your foot down and demand that all such exposures be removed from your community, at W.R. Grace's and the government's expense, not by shifting the financial burden — yet once again — to the people of Libby.

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